

And All the Rest

by TenTenD

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Summary: As Berk's Vikings become more and more powerful, other clans seek their help against mutual foes and outside threats. The dragons are their great advantage, and everyone seeks protection. For this purpose, Lina Heronsdottir has accepted to become the bride of a dragon rider sight unseen. How will Berk survive her? And how will she survive Berk? Post HTTYD2, various pairings.

1. Prologue

A/N: So, I've decided to write something for this fandom too. A little bit about the story. The events take place after HTTYD 2, something like a couple of years after. Meaning that all the members of the dragon training academy are in their early twenties. Reference to the movies and the animated series will be made from time to time, but mostly this will be a story focusing on the Tuffnut/OC relationship and of course there will be a healthy dose of Ruffnut, Barf and Belch, shenanigans and possibly embarrassing situations.

DISCLAIMER: I do not own anything except my original characters and I gain nothing but entertainment from this!

A fair warning, don't take what you read very seriously. I'm only here to have fun. Enjoy! :)

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><p>Lina brushed her hair as Edda bounced the youngest of her children on her knee. She hid behind her task like a warrior would behind his shield, silently hoping that Odin would take pity on her and the earth swallowed her whole soon.<p>

"Father is trying his best," Edda spoke, Hildegard gurgling as if in agreement with her mother. "Berk is becoming a great power and it

falls to you to unite us all. It is a great responsibility. Their new Chief has agreed to a wed one of his men to you when father made the offer."

Much as she wanted to ignore those words, Lina saw the truth in them. Berk had dragons, something that other Viking tribes obviously lacked. She tugged at her hair one last time before depositing the comb underneath the fur pelt she used to pillow her head in the dark hours of the night. "I know my place, Edda," Lina assured her sister while braiding her hair. "And I know my duty."

On their small island two things were sacred honour and duty. Raised as the last daughter of the village's Chief, Lina had been told all through her growing years what was expected of her. All her life the brave men and women of her home had protected her against outside threats. Now it was her turn to repay them. A marriage between herself and a dragon rider would ensure that should there be an attack upon her village, the forces of Berk would merge with her father's warriors and together they would repel the threat.

"Better some young warrior than Old Stooped Gren, don't you think?" Edda tried to make her smile as she was wont to do. All that Lina managed was a grimace.

Of course the fact that she found no acceptable suitors in her own village had played its part. Her father had tried, Odin knew he had. But Lina had not been amenable to any of her prospective grooms. The truth was that while she had been raised in the home of the Chief she was no natural daughter of his. Lina had been found of a wooden craft set adrift at sea. She had been alone in the small boat and when she made it to shore on the Island of Loutish Vandals the people had been kind enough to take her in. But they had never really accepted her.

She had been a small thing and that hadn't really changed even with all the years that passed. She lacked the stoutness that was considered ideal in a woman. Her form was slender, her skin freckless and her arms not made to hold a war hammer, a spear or a sword. Lina hadn't been bothered by it in the beginning, for Chief Heron's daughters, despite their differences, had embraced Lina as their sister. But with them gone, she found her life strangely listless.

Brunhild had been the oldest and the first to wed. Her home was further down in the village, but as a wife and warrior she had little time for anything but her home and weapons. Maeve had followed after, but her husband had died during a Berserker raid. That left the second sister in care of her twins, a handful even when they were on their best behaviour. Svipul had died in childbed, her son taken in by her parents when his father met his end at sea. Edda too had found herself a man, but he was of another island. He'd come to choose a bride, and his choice had been between herself and her fair sister. Lina bore Edda no grudge. She was not Viking wife material it would seem; it was no fault of Edda's.

As for the men of her own village, most considered her too skinny to be attractive and much too small to bear children well. In turn, Lina thought them either too forceful or much too old to wed. Her father had at one point considered giving her hand to Young Wrennon, who was in fact twice Lina's age and had had for wives before. Then there was

Old Stooped Gren. He was not old at all, but he had a hunchback and a limp. He was a kind man, but he barely even knew how to feed himself. Lina did not want such a husband.

Somehow though, the Island of Berk seemed to be in need of unmarried women. Lina knew the Chief of the Hairy Hooligans had probably been very much attracted to the large dowry her father had offered to the tribe if one of his men took her to bride. It was humiliating. But she knew better than to complain.

"I just wish you could come with me," Lina said to Edda. "I will be alone there. Without any of my sisters. At the mercy of strangers."

"That's rot!" Edda chided her. "You'll have your husband and his family. That's not alone."

"If he'll have me," the younger woman muttered under her breath. Most men took one look at her and turned around in search of a woman more to their taste.

"Oh, he will. Why won't he? You are a pretty little thing. You haven't much meat on those bones, I grant you, but your face is attractive. I wish I had a face like yours." Edda brushed Hildegard's hair. She was a kind woman if not beautiful. And Edda really was not beautiful. She was broad shouldered and tall, almost two heads over Lina. Her hips were wide and her middle plump. She was a healthy woman in the prime of her life, with glowing skin and a mop of untidy red curls. She was not at all beautiful, but she had found herself a perfect place. Lina would have jumped at such a chance. She would trade her pretty face for a situation like Edda's.

"Well, since father is paying them in iron and copper to give me a husband, it's the last they can do and he'll be obliged to accept me." Hildegard crawled over the dusty floorboards into Lina's lap.

"You're the crafty one in our family. You'll find a way to have him open his heart to you," Edda predicted, moving around the room. "Here, let me braid your hair before mother comes."

As good as her word, Edda worked her fingers through Lina's hair. The tugging and the pinching would be nothing compared to the painfully embarrassing conversation she would have to hear from her mother, Lina was sure. Turra Daughterbringer was a good woman. But she was not at all eloquent when it came to intimate matters. Despite having had her fair share of births, she could only stammer through the advice that her daughters needed to hear before they were wedded. It was a agonizing and awkward process that would take too much of Lina's time and yield too little information.

"Can't you just tell me what all the fuss is about?" Lina asked, arms holding Hildegard securely to her chest. "I needn't wait for mother to hear this."

"And rob her of the privilege of educating you?" Edda gasped. "I think not, sister mine. Wait for mother you shall." She was tying the thick plait she had made, Lina felt. "Remember, we all suffered â€" I mean submitted to this family tradition."

Edda was right. Their mother's fumbling to explain to them the more intricate aspects of human relationships was a sort of tradition. From Brunhild to Edda, each and every one of her sisters had been taught by way of word about what waited for them in their marriage bed. And each and every one of them had been left with more questions than answers. As if the whole situation was not nerve-wracking enough. Edda's soft laughter was not soothing her one bit. Lina threw her a mean look.

"How comforting," the younger sister mocked. She rolled her eyes and handed Edda the child. "I wish you a good night." She'd had enough of sibling teasing for one night.

"To you too." It was just as well that Edda spoke, for the door creaked, announcing the arrival of Turra. Edda stood to her feet and walked past her mother with a smile.

Turra held two wooden mugs in her hands. The scent of warm milk wafted to Lina's nose. She breathed in deep. "I put some honey in yours," the older woman said kindly. She was almost unchanged from Lina's childhood. Still more wide than tall with big warm hands and kind dark eyes. It was one of the few things she had in common with her family, eyes the colour of mud someone had once said. A few streaks of silver nestled among wider strips of spun gold. "How are you feeling?"

"Nauseous?" No quite, she decided upon further examination. She was queasy but not to a great degree.

"That the excitement," her mother said understandingly. "The day before I wedded Heron I was so thrilled I almost hugged my pet board to death." Lina could see that. "And the morning of the wedding, ah, I shan't bore you with such details. The more important thing is the wedding night."

Lina leaned in, curiosity stealing over her. "Aye. The wedding night."

"Aye." Her mother grew flustered and fidgety. "That. The wedding night." It was going even worse than Lina had expected. Silence stretched out between them. Turra chewed on her lower lip and cleared her throat. Resolve bloomed on her face. She took a deep breath. For a woman whose second instinct was killing enemies where they stood and the first, smothering her loved ones with attention, was just as dangerous, she required a bit too much time for such a simple task. "Your husband will share your bed the night of your wedding, and you are expected to oblige him. He will," she stopped, searching for the right words, "Turra finished with a strong blush staining her cheeks. "All you need to do is follow your instincts and pay heed to your husband. He will guide you through this."

Once more silence reigned in the cramped space. The fire flicked in the small pit that had been dug in the centre of the room. The warm light painted her mother's face gently, making her seem softer than she actually was. Lina's breath caught. Automatically her hands came up to cover her mouth as a sob escaped her slightly parted lips. Swift as a cat, Turra gathered her daughter in her arms. Lina's head was pillowed by Turra's chest and in the comforting embrace of her mother she wept like she hadn't done for many years.

"There, sweet child," Turra soothed her. "There, there. No need for tears." Lifting her chin, the mother gave her a soft kiss. "You must be strong, daughter. You will have children of your own soon. Be strong for them for they cannot be so for themselves. You shall love them and rear them into fine warriors, I know. There is a brand new life waiting for you out there."

She could have said that she was happy as she was, she could claim she didn't want a brand new life, but Turra had always known when one of her children was lying. And she never let them get away with it. "I'm going to miss you, mother, and father too. And my sisters," she sniffled. "I'll even miss not being able to properly hold that broadsword." This was her home and they were her family, the only one she had ever known. She had grown up in this woman's arms, despite not being of her womb. "Mother, I really will miss you."

"I know. We will miss you too." Holding her even tighter, Turra hummed a song, a half-forgotten lullaby. "Make us proud, daughter. Your shoulders might not be as broad as mine, but you have strength in you. All my daughters do. I've raised you well."

* * *

><p>The sails had been spread wide, the bear-like creature, protector of the Loutish Vandals, artfully drawn of them. Lina had always wondered why they'd chosen that animal. Of course there was a certain likeness between her clansmen and the bear; they were tall and broad, strong enough to snap a woman like her in two without much effort. Bears were fierce fighters and protective of their territory. Lina smiled. The bear was perfect fit. Glancing over her shoulder, Lina looked at her village one last time.<p>

"Are you ready?" Heron asked her, gently taking her by the shoulder.

"I am," she answered in a soft voice. The iron ornaments in her hair jangled with every step she took, their gray shine bright against her dark tresses. The wooden stairs creaked under her feet as he climbed aboard the vessel.

The Brawny Maiden had been built especially for this voyage. It was long and wide, fashioned in the exact form of a brawny maiden, Lina thought. The wood had been painted in festive colours. The whole village had gathered to see her off. While they would never laud her as they did the Chief's trueborn children, they were blind good she did them, so they cheered her and hailed her with shouts of long live and good fortune. She was a seal. She was a promise of peace and plenty. She was a promise of dragons and no more Berserker attacks. Lina inclined her head towards the elders of the village as a sign of respect, waved to her parents and to Edda and to the people only after.

The ship set sail, moving slowly through the water. The journey would not be very long. Her father had made the same journey and he counted four days of journey and one afternoon. She took in the salty scent all around her and gave Captain Hutch a tremulous smile. Anxiety made her stomach rumble in protest. The smile slipped from her face.

"Don't be getting sick on my ship," Hutch warned her. "The smell will

get dragons here faster than you can blink and then we'll all be dragon snack."

Hutch Hitchson had been sailing the sea long before she was born. Now he was an old man, with thinning grey hair and a long beard. He had the tendency to fall asleep in the mead hall and children would sometimes tie knots in his bread. When he woke the culprits were punished by their parents with untangling the wiry hairs and combing them straight. Sometimes a few lucky ones would be allowed to braid the beard. Of course their hands had to be freshly washed and scrubbed free of any dirt. But it was a treat they relished all the same. Hutch was a gruff man with a heart of gold underneath all the layers of dirt and stubbornness.

"I won't," Lina assured him, tapping her foot to the floorboards. She was not so sure of that actually. Her stomach rumbled again. Perhaps if she had something to chew on. Amid all the commotion she hadn't been able to take more than one bite of bread and a cup of water in the morning. Well, she didn't want to be eaten by dragons, Lina decided, so she would have to make do.

Looking up, Lina could not help thinking that it was a perfect day to set sail on. The sky was clear, light blue and cloudless. Odin was good. The sea was calm, and nothing seemed out of place. This would be a nice voyage, she was sure. Smoothing the invisible creases from her dress, she searched for anything that might serve as a stool. Lina had been up very early and she had walked all about the village, making last minute preparations and saying her goodbyes.

"Have you seen the man I am to wed?" she asked the Captain, hoping that at least she could find a description of his features if not his character.

"Can't say I have, lassie. But he is one of the dragon riders." And it seemed that it was all anyone could tell her about this man she would have. Lina sighed. "All those riders are brave Vikings. You are better off with anyone of them than you would have been with a man from our village."

Or with a Berserker. That would have been another brilliant choice. But it was not one Lina would have accepted, if only because that ilk did not know a thing about keeping their word. How many treaties had been signed with Dagur the Deranged only to be attacked later despite promises of safety? If she had to play the part of a seal, she would rather it be for a true pact. Besides, the dragon riders were young people, she would very likely get along well enough with them. And if she avoided all contact with Dagur and his men, her life would be complete.

Toying with one of the sleeves of her dress, Lina appraised herself. She had been garbed in the traditional bridal dress of her island. Which was to say that carious metal trinkets had been placed in her hair, which had been allowed to flow down her back for one last time. After she wedded, it would be pinned up to mark her woman and mistress of her own home. She had also been given her maiden's belt, a heavy leather contraption that clung to her waist. It was extremely wide on her and studded with iron spikes. Her husband's job would be to unlace it without drawing blood. It was always a bad sign if he cut himself. Knowing her luck, Lina half expected that that would be the situation. She smothered a laugh.

Suddenly a shadow fell over them. Lina looked up, expecting that cloud had gathered for a storm. To her surprise and rising terror, a huge black beast was flying above them. Lina let out a squeal of distress. But the creature ignored her and lowered itself until it stood less than four feet above them. Captain Hutch seemed unconcerned.

"No need to fret," he told her. A moment later someone jumped off that mountain of a beast. "Mistress Lina, meet Hiccup Horrendous Haddock, the third, chief of the Hairy Hooligans." He gave her an amused glance. "Master Hiccup, this is Lina daughter of Heron the Wise.

The newcomer stared at her with thinly disguised interest. There was even flicker of shock there. "I am pleased to make your acquaintance," he said, a model of decorum. "When your father proposed an alliance between our clans and said he would send the last of his daughters, I confess I was expecting someone a little different."

Chief Hiccup was a tall man with an open face and green eyes that immediately caught her attention. He was handsome and young. A pity, had he been her husband she could have breathed easier now. "Chief," she replied, "I hope I am not a disappointment."

His face went red. "I did not mean it like that," he stuttered, one hand gesturing wildly. "You are rather young."

"I am old enough to wed," she offered. He looked at her very seriously, inspecting every inch of her. Lina was tempted to say to him a few choice words. She was not a horse. And she did not appreciate the dragon looming over her. "Must your whatever he is fly so close above us?"

"Toothless?" He seemed not to understand her for a brief moment. His lips curved in a smile. "He is harmless, Lina daughter of Heron, but he cannot come aboard. His weight would sink the boat."

"Then he best not put one paw in it, or I'll have his hide," the Captain warned.

"Is it not a little early for a greeting committee?" Lina watched the dragon eyeing her. There was a certain cuteness to his face. The Chief had referred to the dragon as a he. However, why had he been given that name, when quite clearly he was in possession of razor sharp teeth? Lina did not even bother trying to understand.

"I have come to ensure none of you meet any mishaps en route to Berk. These are dangerous waters." He gave her a shallow bow. "And I thought you might like to hear about the man that has been chosen for you."

Finally, Lina smiled. She had grown a wee bit worried when he mentioned unsafe waters, but the prospect of hearing about her future husband temporarily shifted her attention. "That would be most welcomed," she said. "Would you care to come to sit down with me?"

The small bench she had been provided with was certainly wide enough.

Hiccup nodded and she led him by the arm, trying not to stare too much at the metallic leg. Viking often had such limbs to replace those they'd lost. The man did not seem bothered by her scrutiny. He sat down with her and gave her a reassuring smile.

"I used to be the runt of the litter," he told her without preamble. She felt the kinship almost as soon as the words left his mouth. "The other children in the village would tease me and I never really had any friends. And then Toothless came along and changed everything."

Furrowing her brown, Lina resisted the urge to lean in. "My husband was one of those children?" Oh great, she could already picture the man's face when he saw her.

"Aye, but he is not a cruel person. A bit of a trickster, Tuffnut Thorston is his name. If there is any chance of mischief, you may be sure he and his sister will dive right in. They are twins. We have a saying in Berk, where there's smoke, there's the twins." He laughed and for some reason Lina found herself laughing with him. At least her marriage would never be dull. "We were hoping a wife might help settling him down a little."

"He rides a dragon as well, is that not so?" she questioned, her interest raised. "What sort of mighty beast is it?" Lina knew very little about dragons other than that they breathed fire and approaching them usually resulted in severe damage to one's health or possibly even death.

"He shares a Hideous Zippleback with his sister, Ruffnut. They have named the two heads Barf and Belch. Tuffnut is in control of Belch, while Ruffnut had command of Barf."

A strange name, Lina thought. "They have a strange sense of humour, these twins," she observed. That would suit her just fine. Lina was less comical minded, so she supposed that she would worry about the practical aspects of life, which was all she'd ever done anyway.

"Indeed. I think you will like the twins." Hiccup sat back. "They are eccentric to a certain point, and their pranks are not always in the best of tastes, but they mean no ill." She even understood the unspoken promise that nothing potentially lethal would happen to her. Lina was quite proud of herself and very grateful for the warning.

"Perhaps your dragon would like it more if you climbed back on," she said after a brief pause. Toothless seemed anxious to have his rider back and Lina felt it was not her place to obstruct him.

"You may call him Toothless if you wish," he said by way of putting her at ease. "Anyway, Toothless and I will be watching over you up there." He pointed to the sky and sat up. Toothless growled, putting Lina in the mind of a wild thing. She pressed back against the wood and the Chief gave a soft laugh. "You'll get used to the dragons. Berk is full of them."

Somehow that did not put her at ease at all. Lina managed a smile, or what she thought was a smile. It might not have looked like a smile. "I am certain you are right," she replied woodenly.

* * *

><p>AN: Dun dun! That's it for now. Do tell me what you think._

2. Chapter 1

Ruffnut chuckled under her breath. She hid her prize behind her back. Barf and Belch growled in unison. "Oh, shut up, you!" Giving the two heads a mean look, Ruffnut watched as her parents argued over who would inhabit the additional body that had been attached to their house. Sitting down with her back against Barf and Belch, Ruffnut enjoyed the show. They were this close to knocking their helmets together.

"They will not have the old rooms," the twin's mother argued. "I've barely managed to remove the stains from your son and daughter's last escapade."

"Oh, so they are my son and daughter now, are they?" the man grumbled. "But when they burned those Berserker ships they were yours." He pointed his finger at her accusingly, "I taught them better than that," his voice boomed.

"Thor's foot, you did! You gave them leave to keep a dragon in here," she retorted, throwing her hands up in the air. "Of all the foolish thing to do, it had to be that!"

"Exactly!" Ruffnut threw in. To her delight her father's face grew red. Though it might have had more to do with him stepping in a puddle of dragon drool than her actual words. They both turned to glare at daughter and dragon. Ruffnut gave an embarrassed little laugh. "Forget I said anything."

"Young lady," her mother started, arms crossing over her chest, "do you think this is amusing? I have been working and working to greet my new daughter properly. Look at this place! It's an absolute mess after days of cleaning." Her eyes narrowed in a deadly glower. "It's like you don't even appreciate my efforts."

The door flew open and her brother ran in. He completely ignored the elders and made for Ruffnut. "What have you done with her?" he yelled, grabbing her by the shoulders and shaking her hard. "What have you done with my Macey? Macey, where are you?" Tuffnut cried, releasing his sister. "What am I going to do? Oh gods! A lifetime of bad luck."

"Ruffnut, give it back," the older man sighed. "Thor almighty! I love you both, but I swear upon Odin's beard that if you ruin this wedding, I'll have both of you hanged. By your ears."

"Don't look at me," Ruffnut said sullenly. She hated being caught.

"Ruffnut, the mace," her mother returned calmly. "Now!"

Sighing deeply, Ruffnut searched behind Barf and Belch's front leg. She pulled out the weapon and threw it at Tuffnut. It caught him in

the stomach. "There's your stupid mace."

Tuffnut hugged the mace to his chest. "I don't think it's safe to allow Macey out of sight," he told his mother, clutching the handle even tighter. "I'll just take it with me to the dock."

"You will do no such thing," she assured him, snatching it from his hands. "Your father and I will keep this for you. As for you, young lady, I expect you to be the soul of grace and dignity when you meet your new sister. Remember, her dowry will finance the rest of your life."

It had already financed her new clothing and a pair of long knives. Ruffnut looked down at her light blue tunic and black boiled leather leggings. She nodded obediently, knowing fully well that a clout over the head would be merciful if her mother's mood turned black. After all, the matriarch was right. Tuffnut's bride brought a small fortune with her. There was no use in disliking someone whose friendship could prove advantageous. All the things she could get, Ruffnut smiled. "Understood." Or at least she thought she did.

Her brother had been treated to a more special outfit. Scrubbed clean and dressed in the best clothes he had ever worn, he looked almost handsome. Ruffnut thought he was rather excited about the whole wedding business. She understood if truth be told. A Viking wedding was one of those affairs where mead flowed and excitement was all around. That was not even mentioning all the pranks that could be pulled on the guests. Ruffnut already had a few good ones planned. She even had the perfect victims in mind. And she would have a few full days.

As Viking weddings went, one that lasted less than three days was considered a dull affair. Given that this wedding sealed a pact between two clans and had a great political importance, the bride's and the groom's family had settled on five days of feasting. The schedule had been discussed over and over again. The bride would arrive on the first day. She would exchange vows with the groom at sundown, and then the sacrifices to the gods would be made. Ruffnut could not wait for that. Thor would never see a better dragon race in a thousand years; she was willing to be her right arm on it. And that was her good arm. After that it would be time for the bride to undergo a purification ritual and the groom would be taken away by his male relatives and friends to a night of drinking and carousing. The second day Freya would be prayed to for blessing and fertility and in the evening another feast would be held in the Mead Hall. On third day the bride and groom would receive gifts from their guests as separate individuals. The fourth day was the bedding day. Ruffnut already knew what she wanted to sneak in the bed of the newlyweds. And finally on the fifth day the newlyweds would be given gifts as a couple.

"Where is the bridal crown?" mother asked as she stepped over Barf's neck. "The bride will need her crown."

"It's right there, mother," Tuffnut pointed to the low table near the window. He seemed annoyed. Or possibly scared. Both were fine by Ruffnut. "Can we go already?" He was ignored. Tuffnut picked the circular ornament up and held it in front of his face, analyzing it.

A bridal crown signified woman's purity. Usually it was made of flowers and sweet smelling herbs. Berk had a slightly different custom. The bridal crown Tuffnut held was a bronze circlet on which a few flowers and herbs had been tied to ward away evil spirits and protect the bride. Spikes and wiry vines tangled along its length, but the inside was smooth as silk.

"I wore that when I married your father," their mother reminisced with a small smile on her face. "What days those were. We were so young then. Oh, my little Tuff, you are all grown up." Due to an excess of affection, their dear mother threw herself on her son and crushed him in her loving embrace, effectively cutting off any possibility for him to breathe.

Ruffnut struggled to keep her laughter in as her brother wheezed and struggled to break free. Unfortunately for her, she was not quiet enough. "Of, Ruff. Don't worry, your days shall be here soon." Their mother turned to her. She tried to dodge, but Belch's head came in behind her and cut off her retreat. "Just make sure to pick a nice strong Viking. It's always important that he can be able to fight alongside you," the woman instructed, squeezing her daughter.

It was Tuffnut's turn to laugh and he had absolutely no problem with displaying his amusement. "Yeah, Ruffnut. Pick someone strong. I suggest Gobber," he teased good-naturedly. "I'm sure he could be induced to take you."

Breaking free of her mother's strong arms, Ruffnut jumped over whatever obstacles happened in her way and crashed into her brother, sending both of him and herself crashing to the floor. There she proceeded to strangle him. Tuffnut returned as good as he got. It was their play ever since they'd been babes. Before they could crawl, they were pinching and kicking at each other. Other siblings had different ways to show affection, this was theirs. "What did you say?" she yelled, even as her father dragged her off.

"Do you have wool stuffed up your ears?" Tuffnut mocked. He stopped short when he felt the sting of his mother's ministrations upon the back of his skull. He seemed to hold in a yelp. Another time he might have cried out. Aye, her brother was all grown up.

"Enough you two," their mother complained. "All you do is fight. You'll ruin these nice clothes. Best climb that beast of yours and make for the dock. The Chief had been gone enough time already."

Climbing back to his feet, Tuffnut glowered at his sister. "This is not the end of it," he warned her. However he was much too interested in that bride that Hiccup had promised him. For the past few years both their parents had been bothering the twins to settle down and produce children. Apparently the only thing a mother wanted more than children was grandchildren. And the perfect opportunity had been thrown his way. Tuffnut grabbed it with both hands. A bride had been found for him without him having to lift a finger.

Barf and Belch flew at an easy pace, neither rider seeing any need to rush. Now that he stood only a hairsbreadth away from meeting the woman, Tuffnut's eagerness seemed to melt in the back of his mind. All joking aside, what if he did not like her? For all he knew, Heron the Wise could have dressed a mountain troll in a dress, put it on a

ship and offer it as a bride. He shuddered. Suddenly, the whole business did not seem quite so attractive.

"Scared?" Ruffnut taunted him. He only nodded. "I'm glad to hear that," she offered without a whit of solemnity. "I hear those Vandal women are big and mean, exactly what you need in a wife. She'll snap you in two like a twig," Ruffnut laughed.

"Maybe I'll be lucky and she'll think you are me and snap you in two," he answered with a grin of his own. He imagined a wider, stronger version of Astrid with her arms around Ruffnut. He realised with a start that he did not want that. Alas it was too late to turn back, though he was sorely tempted.

Everyone was counting on him to seal the alliance. No matter what she looked like, he would have to swallow his distaste and play her husband. If only for a few days. After that he could run off on Barf and Belch if he did not like her. A brilliant plan. Feeling more at ease, Tuffnut helped his sister land their dragon.

People had already gathered from all around the village to witness the arrival of their grain-giver. The human sea parted as he and Ruffnut passed between them. The boast had almost reached the bridge. Toothless landed on the ground next, but Hiccup was not on his back. From their left, Astrid gave Tuffnut a smile and mouthed something he did not understand.

Looking away from the Chief's wife, he saw a plank being lowered from the ship to solid ground. Hiccup was the first human he saw, but he did not hold Tuffnut's attention. On his friend's arm, a woman was being led towards them. Ruffnut had been wrong. She was not at all big and muscular. In fact, slim and petite as the female was he doubted she could do much damage even if she tried. Blue eyes searched her face. Brown orbs stared back at him with interest, they widened almost imperceptibly at the contact. She lowered her gaze, soft looking hair spilling over her shoulder.

"Tuffnut! Hey," Hiccup greeted him, his hand touching the woman's in a manner that indicated he desired her attention.

"Hiccup," he replied absently, too busy staring at the woman.

"May I present to you," he paused, took in the crowd and spoke louder, "to all of you, Lina, last daughter of Heron the Wise and formerly of the Loutish Vandals!" The men and women cheered, welcoming her into their midst, for soon she would belong to the Hairy Hooligans. "Lina, this is Tuffnut Thorston, son of Tuffnut Thorston, rider of a Hideous Zippleback and part of the Hairy Hooligans tribe."

"I am honoured," she answered in a faint voice that made it hard to decipher if she spoke the truth or if she was merely being polite. Lina looked up. "I am thrilled to meet all of you," she addressed the people. "I have heard much of the courage and skill of the people of Berk. It is an honour to become one of you."

Ah, but she had a skilled tongue and she had known exactly how to flatter his kinsmen. Tuffnut looked over his shoulder at his sister. Smart women made him nervous, especially when he thought he might like one. Ruffnut raised one eyebrow at him and gave an odd little

smile as if to say he was on his own.

* * *

><p>He wasn't running for the hills, or rather cliffs, which was more apt to describe the geographical characteristics of Berk as it happened. He seemed happy enough to gaze at her as she made her way off the boat. The Brawny Maid gathered her sails and the rest of her entourage removed to land.<p>

Her husband-to-be walked closer to her and Lina lowered her gaze from his face. He was handsome, with wide blue eyes and long blonde hair, and tall. A Viking by gait and measure, the man was everything she could have ever hoped for in a potential mate. Yet he walked with his shoulders stooped, more out of habit it would seem rather than because of necessity. It made him look a tad shorter. Mayhap she could encourage him to correct his posture.

The hilarity of the thought struck her. Encourage him, would she? She did not even know him. But she would. And he would know her. And mayhap if she prayed to the gods hard enough, she might have the good fortune of a good marriage. The fact remained, he could simply be overwhelmed by the situation. Men were a curious mixture of bravery and folly when it came to the matters of the heart.

Lina resisted the urge to touch her cheek and feel the burn of the hot blood beneath the skin. She hoped the blush did not make her look like a tomato. Tuffnut Thorston had given her his arm after the Chief released her and the introductions went on. Linda had made the acquaintance of Astrid, the Chief's wife, Gobber, the local smith, Mulch and Bucket, Tuffnut's sister, Ruffnut, Valka, the Chief's mother, along with the other riders Snotlout and Fishlegs. Out of them all it was Snotlout that amused her most. There seemed to be a rivalry between the male dragon riders and it showed even in front of strangers like her.

Snotlout Jorgenson had stridden up to them, tall as an oak tree and wide as a bull. He was not taller than her future husband, but to Lina's mind he had a decent height, and dark as a stormy night. But he smiled insolently at them and punched Tuffnut in the arm. "My fair lady, allow me to rescue you from this beast at your side," he had started boldly. "She's too good for you, Tuff," he had spoke to his friend then, "and she too will realise it soon enough. Just don't cry when she comes running to me." He'd given her a suggestive look.

Ruffnut had simply grinned and then gave a small nod. As if Thor himself had reached out from the clouds to grab the rival, Snotlout was pulled off the ground. He went up with a yell, and everyone laughed as Barf and Belch threw him in the air. Ruffnut cheered the two headed dragon. Luckily for him, his own dragon, Lina thought she heard the name to be Hookfang, dived after him. Fishlegs' approach had been a tad subtler and he seemed devoid of any intentions that might have lurked through Snotlout's brain, for which Lina was grateful. One man to mock her tender sensibilities was quite enough. Astrid and Hiccup were civil and she could already perceive they would be good friends if she opened herself to them. The dragons worried her though. They looked magnificent, she could not deny, but their very presence spelled danger.

Ruffnut presented herself as a special case. The twin sister of Tuffnut, she did not seem to have her brother's easiness around her. In fact, she could have been a dragon herself, Lina suspected, and do a splendid job at it. It seemed to Lina that the blonde was trying very hard to censor herself. Perhaps she resented the newcomer for stealing her brother away. Twins tended to have a strong bond. It was normal. Lina did her best to put the other woman at ease. One smile had been enough though to make Ruffnut throw her veneer away and revert to a slightly feminine version of her brother. They were very alike and not only when it came down to their looks. It seemed that dragons were not to be worried over after all.

So, flanked by the twins and surrounded by strangers, she was led to the Mead Hall. It was there that she would meet the head of the Thorston family, who apparently was also named Tuffnut. Her own son might one day be named Tuffnut. Her daughter might be a Ruffnut. Somehow, the thought niggled at her. Children. Would she even be able to have children? Viking women were supposed to have broad shoulders and broader hips to bear strong sons and they needed a full chest to nurse them through the long winters. Only the strong survived after all. Perhaps if she had known her birth parents her fears might have been put to rest, however that was not the case. She would need to trust her gut instinct and go with it. And every tiny piece of her screamed that what she had was good.

The problem was that if she did not give her husband heirs, the law allowed him to put her aside and take a new wife, or at least have a concubine upon whose children he would settle all his worldly possessions. She resisted the urge to shudder. There was no reason to be thinking that far ahead into the future. There were potions to try and prayers to say. The goddesses might even take pity on her and give her the child soon. She was young and healthy enough.

The whole of her island relied on her marriage to provide the Loutish Vandals with dragons. She had to please her husband. He looked an affable sort of man if a bit uncouth with the way he parlayed back and forth with his sister and Snotlout. And he was a good man. She had to keep telling herself that a few more times before she could accept it as the truth. It would all turn out fine, she decided half a heartbeat later when he pulled her just a fraction closer, her elbow tucked against his ribs. Lina shoved the dark thought away.

"You are too tense," he said in a soft voice. "How will you enjoy the festivities like this?" Lina detected amusement and curiosity in his voice. "Like my sister always says, let all your troubles fade away before a party."

"What do you do after the party?" she asked with a confused smile, having expected at least a reminder of the fact that Vikings were strong, enduring people. He gave her an odd look, probably distracted by a shout from the crowd. "With the problems?" Lina added for clarity's sake.

"Ignore them," Tuffnut answered promptly. "There will always be someone willing to solve them for you. This way, you can actually enjoy watching them trying. And in the end they'll have solved it better than you would have anyway."

Lina's composure dissolved into a small smile. She could not argue

with the man's logic, if it could be called that. All he lacked was confidence. "You and your sister seem very close," she noted pleasantly. It was her hope that Ruffnut would come to like her. Life would be infinitely easier then. After all, who would know Tuffnut better than the sister he grew up with?

"We have always been so," was his short reply. "Are you not likewise close to your sisters?"

"To some more than to others," Lina confessed unabashed. While she loved all her sisters as fellow kinswomen, to some she felt a deeper kinship. "I was much closer to Edda than I was to any of the other three of my sisters. We were closer in age and temper and almost always together."

"And you are the youngest." It wasn't really a question, however Lina confirmed the information he put forth with a nod. "I'm also the youngest. Tuffnut was actually more eager to see the sunlight than me. My father thought he would get no son."

The truth of it showed. Ruffnut held more sway between the two of them. Lina suspected that Tuffnut would happily follow his sister into the frozen fires of Hel and back if only she took it in her head to ever set foot there. Which Lina saw as probable at some point.

"He must have been relieved when you came along." As all men were when they saw themselves with a heir on their hands. "My father had only daughters. My mother's mother as well." Though she spoke of the people who had taken her in. She might still have blood siblings somewhere. "But I am sure I could give you a son."

"A son or a daughter. Both would do just as well." He gave her a warm smile. "If you'd ever seen my sister or Astrid in a fight, you would know what I mean. They are as fearsome as any man I've ever known and then some."

But she wasn't, Lina wanted to say. A daughter of hers could well end up like the mother. Instead she held her tongue. "They do seem skilled, and both ride dragons. It would be a very foolish man that one who did not fear them."

"They usually do," Ruffnut laughed. "Though we sometimes get the occasional fearless Viking who thinks he can compare with either of them. Most flee before any true damage can be done, but there have been one or two with singed body parts. Ruffnut is fond of scaring the enemy off with fire. Hiccup's woman prefers setting Stromfly's spikes on them, though the Deadly Nadder has the hottest flame."

"What about Barf and Belch? How do they comport themselves in battle?" While she admired the Chief's wife, Lina was certain she was more interested in the dragon she would live with. She wondered if the giant pet might be of some use around the house. "It must be convenient to have double firepower in one package."

Tuffnut laughed. "Barf and Belch cannot produce fire one without the other. Aptly named, Barf will blow out a flammable gas, and Belch will spark it, producing flames. I cannot control the dragon without my sister and she cannot fly without me. Barf and Belch are sort of

like a mirror for us."

"These dragons are fearsome anyway. I would not climb on one's back to be sure." Her husband-to-be could keep his beast. "But I am glad for them all the same."

Their conversation was cut short as they entered the Mead Hall. Lina knelt in front of Tuffnut's parents to receive their blessings. She saw Tuffnut do the same, as the other guests took their places at the table. "It is time to join the destinies of the two Vikings standing before us on this day." Lina heard the people chanting as she was pushed to stand before the Chief, Tuffnut to her left. "Fellow Vikings lend me an ear and hear these vows that are to be made."

Silence fell over the whole room. Lina took a deep breath. Hiccup continued. "If there is anyone present that can bring valid objections to the union of these here Vikings, Tuffnut, son of Tuffnut, and Lina, daughter of Heron, speak, and if you hold your tongue, you might as well bite it off if you think to part them later."

No one said a thing. Hiccup nodded. "Then let us proceed. On this Day of the Moon, I, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock, ask you, Tuffnut Thorston, do you take Lina, daughter of Heron, to be a partner to you in all the blessing and hardship the god see fit to bestow upon you?"

"I do," Tuffnut replied solemnly, which drew more than a few surprised looks from the gathering. Lina remembered only then Hiccup's warning, but she had no time to think about potential pranks for it came her time to pledge herself at the altar.

"I now ask you, Lina daughter of Heron, do you take Tuffnut Thorston to be a partner to you in all the blessing and hardship the god see fit to bestow upon you?"

"I do," she agreed with the same solemnity her husband had adopted.

Someone brought the Chief a large bronze chalice. Hiccup held it up in the air. "You are all witnesses to these words. Now it is time to give Jǫrð, mother to us all, her due." He produced a silver knife from his belt and handed it to Tuffnut with a nod. The Chief lowered the chalice and Lina could see the clear mead in it. The scent of it floated to her.

Making a small cut on his arm, Tuffnut allowed a few drops of blood to fall in the beverage. Lina held out her own hand, pulling the sleeve away to bare her arm to the kiss of the blade. Red drops slid into the chalice. Hiccup stirred the mixture softly. He held it up once more. The people gave a cheer the name of the earth goddess on their lips.

Hiccup spilled the contents of the chalice on the ground. The earth swallowed the offering greedily.

"May Jǫrð bless them!" the Chief yelled out.

The others repeated the blessing three times in reply.

* * *

><p>Notes: Very short explanations<p>

Jǫrð is the Norse goddess of the earth

Day of the Moon (Monday) – the name comes from the Norse god of the moon, Máni

Viking Weddings – they really were considered a dull affair unless they lasted longer than three days

You can find more information on the web if you are interested. I hope you have enjoyed this chapter. If you have the time and inspiration, feel free to leave a review.

3. Chapter 2

Despite whatever fears still lurked in her mind regarding the lumbering beasts residing on Berk, and she was not reserving the appreciation only for dragons, Lina found herself relaxing as the evening progressed. If there was one thing to be said about wedding feasts then it was that the food never stopped coming and the ale and mead refused to stop flowing.

Lina had watered her own beverage, for fear of becoming tipsy. She could not lose her wits. As it was, she was fumbling too much for her liking, still unsure of the appropriate behaviour for her circumstances. Mostly she kept her eyes on her husband, making small notes of his likes and dislikes, storing them away for later. There was much to be learned from just watching someone. Lina found that Tuffnut preferred yak sticks to any other sort of meat, but wild boar roasted with apples was also appreciated, as were honeyed goose and crisp fish. Tuffnut had rejected ovine flesh, as had many others of the dragon riders. Luna herself was not fond of lamb to be sure.

From time to time he would carve out the choicest parts of whatever meat was on his plate and he would place it on her with a smile. Lina would nibble on the offering and smile back at him, returning the favour by depositing some of her own food on his plate. She was not yet ready to feed him herself as she had seen some of the other women doing to their husbands.

Somewhere to her left Ruffnut started a brawl, breaking the serene atmosphere. Snotlout was presumably at fault as Fishlegs had heard him say something indelicate to the female twin. Ruffnut, of course, would not simply take the insulting words without reacting. So she lunged for the man, a bone with meat still on it in her hand. She used her weapon wisely, knocking Snotlout on the head, filling his hair with grease and his skull with pain. Snotlout flailed about, knocking some tankard of ale to the ground and accidentally hitting a few of the other guests.

That was all it really took for the rest of the company to join the fight. The hall erupted in chaos, shouts sounding out from all sides, men and women piled one onto the other, kicks and punches flying around. Lina gasped and crawled under the table, successfully avoiding being hit by a cup. Her brave husband jumped in the middle

of the fray, giving out stinging blows to whoever happened in his path. He was stronger than Lina would have guessed.

But before she could admire her spouse for too long a time, he was driven to the ground by a one-armed, one-legged man shouting invectives. Lina rather thought his name was Gobber. She went white. She was barely even married, not at all ready to welcome widowhood. Picking up the first thing she could reach, which was a sturdy trencher, Lina left the safety of her hiding place. She dodged some of the more zealous fighters, avoiding touching anyone so as to not grab their attention. Sneaking through the mess of writhing bodies on the floor, she finally reached her husband and his foe. Lina lifted the trencher overhead and brought it down with as much force as she could.

The wood landed on Gobber's head with a deafening smack, breaking apart on his helmet. Lina's heart stopped when the man looked up at her, his hook lifting towards her face. She expected to be put to the ground herself any moment. She could also feel her husband's eyes on her.

To her utter surprise, booming laughter left Gobber's mouth as he jumped off of Tuffnut and grabbed Lina by the waist, hoisting her up like a child, or rather like a rag doll. Her weight must have meant little to him for he had her off her feet and swinging around. The next moment she was crushed to his chest, air supply cut off. She had been wrong. Widowhood would not be her fate after all. It would be Tuffnut's.

"You let go of my woman right now!" Her ears picked up the yell and the curses that followed after, but Lina barely had the time to make sense of anything before she was suddenly released to fall to the ground. It seemed her little sting left her two very unsure legs, incapable of keeping her above off the ground.

Thankfully, Frigg in her mercy took care of the new bride. She was caught before she could make an intimate acquaintance with the floor of the Mead Hall. Lina shook her head slowly in an attempt to regain her bearings. She looked up to her saviour and found herself peering into twin pools of blue. A smile crossed her lips. "Thank you," she managed to say before she was back on her feet.

"Nay, it is I who thanks you." And in the middle of a fight, surrounded by crawling people of all sides, Lina Heronsdottir received her very first kiss. It was surprising and fast and utterly mind-numbing. A shock of electricity shot down her spine as his lips touched hers and Lina swore she forgot how to breathe in that moment. Nothing mattered beside the pressure of his mouth on hers and the weight of his hand on the small of her back. And then it was over as quick as it had begun. Tuffnut pulled back. He touched her cheek with the back of his hand gently. "I've been waiting to do that."

Lina blushed a violent shade of red. "We should probably help your sister." How awkward and ungainly she felt. Lina pursed her lips in silent despair.

"Don't do that," Tuffnut advised her, a mischievous grin already on his face. "It'll only make me want to kiss you again." He laughed when Lina took a step back. She could not have escaped anyway as his hand was still at her back, holding her in place.

Whatever had been between them was broken as someone shoved hard into Lina, propelling her forward into Tuffnut. Her forehead smacked against his shoulder and she garbed at him to keep her balance. The only result achieved was an inelegant sprawl when the two of them fell to the ground.

As if amused beyond belief by the incidents Tuffnut laughed, clutching at her waist. Lina brought her palm to her forehead to rub the sore spot. She herself was laughing a moment later at the ridiculous position. That and his good mood was infectious.

"Let us see about my sister," he murmured.

They slowly got to their feet and navigated the crowd carefully in search of the lost twin. Mercifully for Lina, Ruffnut was easy enough to identify. She had somehow managed to engage another poor fellow beside Snotlout. Lina knew not how but she had managed to get her hands on a shield and proceeded to beat her opponent over the head with it. While permanent damage was out of the question, Lina was sure the man would have the strongest headache on the morrow, or possibly even this very evening. It all depended on his resistance and when he passed out.

For his part Tuffnut was happy to allow his sister a free hand in dealing with her for. He hadn't liked to Lina when he said the women of Berk were strong. So instead of jumping in to save Ruffnut, Tuffnut pulled Lina away, deaf to her protests.

What are you doing?" she asked, trying to extricate her hand from his grasp. "Your sister might still need help."

"She doesn't," Tuffnut assured his little bride. "Besides, there is something we must do."

Rather than seeing her curiosity, he felt it. Ruffnut was supposed to help him with the project he had in mind but she was otherwise engaged and Tuffnut wouldn't dream of ruining her fun. So Lina would have to take her place. And it was a good thing. They were going to spend a lifetime together. Hew might as well get her acquainted with what that would mean.

Barf and Belch were outside the Hall with the other dragon, but as soon as they saw one of its riders the beast trotted over, sniffing at the pair. "Barf, Belch, where is it?" he asked the dragon, his hand hold Lina's firmly. He could feel her pressing against him as Barf's nose touched the top of her head. "Don't worry. They know you're part of the family," he said, hoping to soothe her fears.

Lina made a sound that might have been an agreement, or not. Tuffnut couldn't say. But before he could ask, the dragon finished the inspection and began walking away, one head facing forward and one turned back towards them, beckoning them to follow.

"Where are we going, exactly?" she questioned, lengthening her strides to match his pace. She tightened her clutch on his hand as well.

"I want to check on something," she answered. They reached the

destination quick enough. Barf and Belch where to remain outside and keep watch, while he and Lina would go inside and take care of business.

The barrels were exactly where Ruffnut said they would be. Tuffnut had Lina open one and peer inside. "This is oil," she said after a moment. "Oil made from herbs and flowers, but oil all the same." It was, of course, bathing oil. On special occasions it was added to water to produce a pleasant scent. "What could you possibly want with this?" She eyed him suspiciously and pride bloomed in his chest. He had known she was a smart one.

Tugging two chunks of fish from inside tunic, Tuffnut waited for her to connect the dots. "What do you think I want to do?"

"This particular oil is sensitive." She glanced at the fish. "Adding that to the mixture, while it won't ruin the scent, it will blacken the oil." She brought a hand to her mouth to stifle a giggle. "I hope these are not the barrels that will be used for the purification ritual."

Adopting a mock-hurt expression, Tuffnut pretended to be affronted. "I would never." Though in truth, had she been the troll he'd imagined her to be, he would likely have. "These will be used in two weeks time."

His bride bit her lip. She turned a thoughtful eye to the oil, then to him. "I don't know." Tuffnut simply placed one of the fish in her hand and walked to another barrel.

He lifted the lid and threw in the fish. "What's there not to know?" He placed the lid back on and turned to her, eyes trained on her hand. It was time to see exactly what she was made of.

"Oh, very well," she sighed. She didn't look at the barrel, she even turned her head away, but she let go of her fish, right in the middle of the barrel. There was hope for her yet, Tuffnut decided. "Let us go now," she said, most sensibly. It wouldn't do to be caught after all.

They left hand in hand, giggling quietly at the mischief. His marriage would be a success. His wife, prim, shy and proper as she was, had already shown the makings of a true Viking.

Why he thought his heart would jump right out of his chest when she smashed the trencher on Gobber's head, fearless as a Valkyrie. Chooser of the slain, indeed. Not many men had his luck, Tuffnut decided, and it was a good thing too. He would thank every god he could remember the name of for having destined her to be his.

"I wonder if they will have noticed our absence," she whispered as they neared the Great Hall, Barf and Belch right behind them.

"We needn't explain ourselves to them," Tuffnut reminded her. "What business is it of there is a man wants to walk with his wife."

None, of course. As a wedded couple they were within their right. Had she been on her father's island the rules might have been different. But where she was, she stood his wife. Lina nodded her head as if she'd just remembered that detail.

It was very fortunate that when they returned the fight was just ending and the people of Berk were returning to their seats, each with their own spoils of war, be it a chicken leg or some yak sticks. The bride and groom they shouted bawdy jokes at, which Tuffnut met with an impertinent grin and his wife with a healthy flush to her cheeks.

"Just act normal," he whispered in her ear, before they were seated. Not that she hadn't been.

"Of course." His wife took a sip of her drink and gave him a crooked smile.

Likely as not he would end up counting the hours before the purification ritual was over. At this point he had to wonder why it had been insisted on such a long wedding feast. Three days would have done just as well. He took a gulp of his own drink and made a small sound of dismay when he realised there was no more mead in his cup. Lina, however, seemed to have read his mind for she held the pitcher and refilled his glass before he could even think to ask. Aye, the marriage was a very, very good thing to have happened to him.

* * *

><p>Ruffnut wiped the grease off her hands, using an unconscious Snotlout as her rag. In his state he would never find out. And what one didn't know, couldn't hurt them. Not that Ruffnut had anything against hurting Snotlout, if anything she rather enjoyed it. Unfortunately by now even the likes of Snotlout knew not to annoy her overly much, except when he was tipsy. So Ruffnut, whenever she itched for a good fight, gave him ale, mead or wine to provoke him. And he fell for it. Every single time.<p>

"Maybe you should let him breathe now," Fishlegs suggested, though he did not make a single move to free Snotlout. Their rivalry was alive and thriving. Thank Thor for that.

"You think?" Ruffnut slapped Snotlout for good measure. He didn't even flinch. "Dead as a rock," she finally agreed. She pushed him away and sat down on the bench next to Fishlegs.

"I think she's nice, Tuffnut's bride," he suddenly said, looking at Ruffnut with something akin to hope in his eyes. "It's strange. I always thought he would be the last of us to settle down."

She shrugged and carefully ignored the strange look. "It could have been you to marry her," she pointed out, not unkindly. Though in her mind the image looked wrong. Lina was too delicate. Poor Fishlegs would probably crush her unintentionally. She choked on her laughter, but covered it with a hasty cough.

Before the current arrangement had been reached, both Snotlout and Fishlegs, along with her brother, were asked if they were willing to wed Heron's daughter. Snotlout had refused first, unable to get over the fear that perhaps the girl was blind in one eye, with a mouthful of crooked teeth and about as fertile as a rock. Of course, he hadn't said as much to the messenger who came to negotiate. In fact, Hiccup didn't even allow Snotlout to open his mouth on that occasion.

Fishlegs had done the same, although his reasoning had to do more with his own soul than anything. Apparently he and his boulder eating dragon were not nearly prepared for married life. Meatlug was the only woman in his life currently and if anyone had bothered to ask Ruffnut she would loudly let them know that the she-dragon would not accept competition. Which was one of the many reasons for which Ruffnut hadn't wanted to enter a relationship with Fishlegs anyway. They were better off as friends.

"I didn't want her," he replied after a few moments of silence. Ruffnut realised just then that he was looking at the bride and groom, happily sharing the last yak sticks on their table.

Something like a coo left her lips. They painted such a nice picture, heads bent close, whispering to one another. It looked innocent. And that was how Ruffnut knew there was nothing remotely innocent about their conversation. Having known her brother since before they were born, Ruffnut could honestly say that if Tuffnut looked innocent, he had likely done something which would earn him a clout over the head in mother ever found out. Which she normally did.

Returning her attention on Fishlegs, Ruffnut gave him a quizzical look. "If you ask her, I'm sure there are other nice girls on her island." She wouldn't be a very good friend if she did not attempt to help. "She might be the last of Heron's daughter's, but no one said anything about her being the only unmarried girl on her island."

Her companion laughed. "Please don't do that. I think Meatlug and I would like to travel a little first." He looked down at his hands. "There is so much of the world that we haven't seen."

"So Fishlegs the Finder, eh?" That actually suited him. "Meatlug will definitely like it."

Snotlout groaned, alerting them of his return to the world of the living. Ruffnut too gave a groan, for entirely different reasons. She stared at him with exasperation, wondering if she ought to knock him unconscious once again. He had the worst timing possible. Had anyone ever say as much to him? If not, Ruffnut was more than willing to enlighten him. Preferably with her fist.

"Welcome back," Fishlegs said dryly, crossing his arms over his chest. "Did you have a good sleep?"

"Everything hurts," Snotlout rasped, prompting a proud smile from Ruffnut. It was always good to know her skills were up to par. "I can't feel my brain."

"You mean to say that you usually can?" Ruffnut gasped, her mockery clearly appreciated by Fishlegs. "And here I thought Hookfang did the thinking for the both of you." She snickered unapologetically at the hurt look on his face.

"You're horrible," Snotlout announced a moment later as she struggled to his feet. "I mean it."

Wiping an invisible tear from the corner of her eye, Ruffnut sniffed softly. "My whole life, I've been waiting for those words. Finally, someone acknowledges my true nature." His compliment did not save him

from a well placed kick to the knee. "Pretty words won't win me over."

"The freezing fires of Hel wouldn't win you over," was the reply she got. Snotlout sat down next to them and took the mutton from Fishlegs' plate, devouring it in less than five seconds. His impressive skills did not produce much of an impression of Ruffnut who was now busy thinking of Hel and other nice places.

"Are you ready for the race?" Fishlegs asked amiably, pushing the rest of his food in Snotlout's general direction. His appetite had been upset it would seem. Snotlout had that effect of people.

"The question is," Snotlout began, between shoving pieces of mutton in his mouth, "are you prepared to lose?"

"We won't lose," Ruffnut assured him. "Tuff and I, we have a plan."

"I hate those words. When you say that half the village usually ends up in flames," Fishlegs pointed out. "And during the wedding feast too."

"Lina won't mind," Ruffnut said with a small frown. The young woman didn't even look like she was enjoying much of the festivities. She could stare into her brother's face all she wanted even if the village caught flame. "She'll be too busy getting to know Tuffnut."

"Shouldn't we help them out? We know Tuffnut, after all." Fishlegs was full of kind thoughts. Unfortunately they were misplaced. If there was one thing her brother would hate, then it was their interference.

"You mean like tell her to keep a candle burning at all times during the night," Snotlout snorted. "I'm sure she'll be glad to know she is the wife of a man who fears the dark, Maybe she'll even let him hide under her skirts."

A kick to the head was Ruffnut's response to the insult. "No one insults Tuffnut, but me!"

Any further conversation dwindled into silence as Hiccup stood to his feet, demanding the attention of his people. Ruffnut rubbed her hands together and looked towards her brother. He was looking back at her with a smirk on his face. This was going to be so good. Ruffnut found herself almost hopping in excitement. If only Hiccup would hurry with his speech.

"People of Berk," the Chief spoke loudly, "you have witnessed the vows and given the gods their due in food and drink. It is time now for another offering. We are fortunate in our allies, and fortunate in the love the gods bear us. Let us not forget, we have dragons!" A cheer went up at that. Hiccup waited until silence reigned again. "We are blessed and the gods deserve our gratitude. The bride and groom deserve our wishes of a bountiful life. Let us not disappoint." A roar of approval cut him off. He smiled and pushed the hair back from his face. "People of Berk, I declare the dragon race open for any of you who wishes to participate."

Finally. It was time. Ruffnut jumped to her feet and raced to where her brother and his wife were. Lina's worried gaze gave her pause. What could she possibly have to fear? "Cheer for us, won't you sister?" Tuffnut asked her, throwing an arm around her shoulders.

The shorter girl appraised her with kind look. "Of course I shall. For whom should I cheer if not for my own family?" The easiness with which she said that made Ruffnut smile. As good a brother as Tuffnut was, a sister was more than welcomed to the group.

"Well said." She shook Lina gently as a show of affection. "Next time you'll join us on your own dragon."

Brown eyes widened considerably. "I couldn't," Lina protested. "I am no dragon rider. But I'll be happy to cheer you on the next time too."

"Nonsense, of course you are," Ruffnut contradicted her. "Isn't she, Tuff?"

"Isn't she what?" her brother asked, a confused look on his face. Ruffnut scowled at him. "What?"

"Lina would make a splendid dragon rider, don't you agree?" she gritted every word out, fully prepared to knock the sense back in her brother's head if it had somehow flown away from him during the mealtime.

"Of course," her brother said empathically, nodding his head. "We could teach you."

"I really don't think that a good idea," Lina insisted.

"It's a brilliant idea. You'll see." Ruffnut clapped her hands in excitement. "Cheer loud, little sister, and we'll win this for you."

"We are winning this for her anyway," Tuffnut said to her half a heartbeat later. He couldn't really seem to make up his mind about where to look. Ruffnut didn't feel the slightest amount of pity for him. But she saw her mother beckoning her away. She had no choice but to go.

"What are you doing, daughter?" the woman hissed, plastering a smile to her face and waving at her son and daughter-in-law. "We must give them time to know one another. How can they do that if you're glued to them?"

"I'm not glued to them," Ruffnut protested. "I was just being nice to Lina. I thought you said I had to."

"And when have you ever listened to me?" her mother grumbled.

"I'm doing it right now," the blonde felt obliged to point out. She and Tuffnut had their moments, but most of the time they did listen, even if only to the first part of the orders or instructions. "Besides they've been together this whole time. I think they even disappeared for a bit together during supper."

"How romantic! Have you seen anything?" her mother asked, clearly delighted with the development.

Would it put a damp on her mood if Ruffnut denied seeing anything? Probably. Nay, definitely. So Tuffnut shook her head. "I only know that they went out and came back in. That's it."

"Oh, you unromantic soul!" the woman lamented. "One day you will understand." She sighed and shooed her away. "Go to that dragon of yours now."

"It's Tuffnut's too," Ruffnut decided to remind her mother.

"Of course it is," she agreed. "Just go to that dragon and make sure to win."

"Oh, we'll win. We shall definitely win." Ruffnut kissed her mother's cheek and took off to where Barf and Belch stood, squabbling over a fish. Tuffnut was coming towards her with another fish in his hands. Seeing it in her brother's grasp, Ruffnut suddenly remembered their earlier plans. AT least now she knew why Tuffnut snuck outside with his wife.

She was starting to like Lina more and more.

"Barf, Belch!" Tuffnut called the dragon's attention. "Come on guys. Enough fooling around." The dragon thumped the ground with its tail. Tuffnut threw the other fish at the heads. They broke it in two and ate it. "Ready?" he asked his sister.

"I was born ready," Ruffnut replied with a winning smile on her face.

The twins climbed their dragon and were promptly flow to the starting line. Hiccup was there on Toothless, joined by Astrid and Stormfly. Fishlegs and Meatlug were behind Snotlout and Hookfang. Fanghook had Gustav on his back and other riders with their dragons were there.

The horn was blown once and all the dragons lifted themselves in the air. Two more horn blasts and the horde of them surged forward. Ruffnut grinned as Barf and Belch took speed. They would not lose this race. Her brother let out a battle cry. The fight had begun.

"Come on guys, fly faster," he encouraged Barf and Belch, a wide smile on his face.

Ruffnut echoed the expression. She closed her eyes and felt the wind blow her hair back. It was such a nice feeling. Flying was her absolute favourite activity. It beat teasing Tuffnut. It was certainly more fun than beating the living daylights out of Snotlout. It was the absolute best, on that she knew most riders agreed.

Ahead of them Stormfly released a rain of spikes. The move was, while not unexpected, very disturbing for Barf and Belch's flying. One tried to avoid them by ducking, the other by flying higher. Somehow they managed to pull through unscathed. Astrid laughed and Tuffnut yelled at the unfairness of it.

Vikings took racing very seriously. "Don't worry. We'll get them!"
Ruffnut yelled over the howling of the wind. "You only have to be prepared!"

Tuffnut nodded. A determined look crossed his face. "Please say we'll take Snotlout out first!"

The idea hadn't occurred to her, but Ruffnut was more than delighted to agree to it. "Let's!"

"Barf, Belch!" they yelled together. "Find Hookfang! Quickly!"
Snotlout wouldn't even know what hit him.

End
file.